

CHAPTER 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the No Action Alternative and five other alternatives for management of off-highway vehicles (OHV's) on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service (FS) Northern Region in Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota (excluding the Black Hills National Forest, Buffalo Gap National Grassland and Fort Pierre National Grassland). The BLM and NFS lands affected by this proposal are those lands currently open seasonally or year-long to motorized wheeled cross-country travel.

This chapter is presented in six sections: Development of Alternatives; Management Common to All Alternatives; Alternatives Considered in Detail; Selection of the Preferred Alternative; Comparison of Alternatives; and Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Study.

DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

The alternatives were formulated in response to the purpose and need and issues discussed in Chapter 1, which are to avoid future impacts from the increasing use of OHV's in areas that are currently available to motorized wheeled cross-country travel and to provide direction for subsequent site-specific planning for a range of safe motorized recreation opportunities.

As discussed in Chapter 1, there were five primary issues identified that reflect concerns or conflicts, which could be partially or totally resolved through the environmental impact statement (EIS) process; need for plan amendment, exceptions, enforceability, flexibility, and identified problems. While these five issues are by no means the complete list of concerns identified during the public scoping process and comments on the draft EIS/plan amendment (DEIS), these issues did help guide the development of the alternatives.

Five alternatives to the No Action Alternative were developed based on input from the public and other agencies during the scoping process and comment period on the DEIS, along with BLM and FS management concerns. These six alternatives are discussed under the section Alternatives Considered in Detail.

MANAGEMENT COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

The following management guidance will continue, regardless of which alternative is selected, and is common to all alternatives.

There are six BLM OHV intensive use areas in Montana (4,210 acres) that would remain open to motorized wheeled cross-country travel under all the alternatives; South Hills area near Billings, Glendive OHV area near Glendive, Terry OHV area near Terry, Glasgow OHV area near Glasgow, Fresno OHV area near Havre, and Radersburg OHV area near Radersburg. In addition, there are some isolated BLM lands (5,500 acres) that would remain open. These isolated lands were addressed in the Elkhorn Mountains Travel Management Plan (1995). Also, the drawdown area (3,630 acres) around Lake Koocanusa on the Rexford District of the Kootenai National Forest would not be affected by any of the alternatives. The drawdown area is currently being addressed in the Rexford District Recreation Management Plan.

The BLM and FS regulations (43 CFR 8341.2 and 8364.1 and 36 CFR 295.2 and 295.5) allow for area, road or trail closures where off-road vehicles are causing or will cause considerable adverse effects upon soil, vegetation, wildlife, wildlife habitat, cultural resources, threatened or endangered species, other authorized uses, or other resources. The authorized officer can immediately close the areas affected until the effects are eliminated and measures are implemented to prevent future recurrence.

Disabled access will be allowed per the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Under the Act, an individual with a disability will not, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity conducted by the BLM or FS. Disabled access per the Rehabilitation Act is considered at the local level on a case-by-case basis. Motorized wheelchairs, as defined in the Rehabilitation Act, are not considered OHV's and therefore are not restricted by any of the alternatives.

The BLM and FS will consult in accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to ensure that any site-specific plan is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any species listed or proposed to be listed under the provisions of the ESA, or result in the destruction or adverse

modification of designated or proposed critical habitat. Access standards in effect for existing recovery plans will be followed in all site-specific plans. In addition, the authorized officer can immediately close areas, roads or trails if OHV use is causing or will cause considerable adverse environmental effects to species listed or proposed to be listed. Information on consultation for this final Environmental Impact Statement and proposed plan amendment (FEIS) is contained in Appendix C.

Under Alternatives 1-5, after the FEIS is completed the BLM and FS would continue to develop site-specific plans (i.e., landscape analysis, watershed plans, or activity plans) for geographical areas. Through site-specific planning, roads and trails would be inventoried, mapped, analyzed, and designated as open, seasonally open, or closed. In addition, site-specific planning could identify opportunities for trail construction and/or improvement, or specific areas where intensive OHV use may be appropriate. Implementation and monitoring are described in Appendix B. Implementation includes prioritizing areas for site-specific planning within six months of the respective agencies' Record of Decision based on the resources in the area, such as riparian areas and threatened or endangered species along with opportunities for recreational OHV use.

Definition of Motorized Wheeled Cross-Country Travel

It is difficult to provide one definition of motorized wheeled cross-country travel and have that definition fit all situations. Roads and trails appear differently on the landscape because of the great variety of terrain, vegetation, soil type, and climate in Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota.

This definition is not intended to supersede road and trail motorized vehicle restrictions already in place that regulate the type of vehicle or season of use.

Cross-country travel is wheeled motorized travel off roads and trails. The following examples further clarify this definition.

Motorized travel is considered cross-country when:

- the passage of motorized vehicles depresses undisturbed ground and crushes vegetation (Figure 2.1).
- the motorized vehicle maximum width (the distance from the outside of the left tire to the outside of the right tire or maximum tire width for motorcycles) does not easily fit the road or trail profile (Figures 2.2, 2.3, 2.4). However, an ATV traveling within a two-track route established by a pickup truck is not considered cross-country travel (Figure 2.5).

- motorized vehicles use livestock and game trails, unless the trails are clearly evident, continuous single-track routes used by motorcycles over a period of years (Figures 2.6, 2.7).

Motorized travel is not considered cross-country when:

- motorized vehicles use constructed roads and trails that are maintained by the agencies. Constructed roads and trails are often characterized by a road or trail prism with cut and fill slopes.
- motorized vehicles use clearly evident two-track and single-track routes with regular use and continuous passage of motorized vehicles over a period of years. A route is where perennial vegetation is devoid or scarce, or where wheel tracks are continuous depressions in the ground, evident to the casual observer, but are vegetated (Figure 2.8).
- motorized vehicles travel on frozen bodies of water. However, access to the body of water must come from existing land-based routes that meet the above specifications and lead to the water's edge.
- motorized vehicles travel over snow on a road or trail that meets the above specifications.

Routes must meet the above specifications for their continuous length. Routes newly created under wet conditions or in wetlands and riparian areas should be easily identified as not meeting the specifications because many portions of the route from its beginning to its terminus would not show signs of "regular and continuous passage of motorized vehicles" and many areas would still be fully vegetated with no wheel depressions.

This definition does have some ambiguity that will exist until designation of roads and trails in site-specific planning is completed. Designation of individual roads and trails would eliminate the ambiguity because any motorized use not on designated roads and trails would be prohibited.

Providing recreational opportunities and managing the resource values for the public to enjoy depends on the public's cooperation when recreating on OHV's. The following factors should be considered along with the definition when using public lands:

- Some routes would still be open that go through riparian areas and wetlands. These areas provide habitat for over 70% of our wildlife and aquatic species and should be avoided.

- Some routes are found on very steep slopes that provide a motorized challenge. However, this may cause serious erosion and gullying that can introduce sediment to streams and should be avoided.
- The spread of noxious weeds has become a serious threat to wildlife habitat and rangelands. Ensure that your vehicle's undercarriage and tires are not carrying weed seeds.
- Many forms of human use can stress or harass wildlife. Respect wildlife you may encounter and proceed with care.
- Cultural resources, such as old cabins, historic mining sites, fossil areas, and traditional cultural properties, are part of our heritage and are for your enjoyment through observation and learning. Leave for others to enjoy and be careful where you drive.



Figure 2.1 ATV traveling overland, off roads and trails, is considered cross-country travel.



Figure 2.2 Motorcycle traveling on single-track trail is not considered cross-country travel.



Figure 2.3 ATV traveling on single-track trail is considered cross-country travel.



Figure 2.4 Pickup truck traveling on ATV two-track trail is considered cross-country travel.



Figure 2.5 ATV traveling within a two-track road is not considered cross-country travel.



Figure 2.6 Motorized use on livestock trails is considered cross-country travel.



Figure 2.7 Livestock or game trail used by motorcycles for regular and continuous passage is not considered cross-country travel.



Figure 2.8 Existing routes have obvious wheel depressions in the ground from continuous travel but are vegetated. Travel on these routes is not considered cross-country travel.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

This section describes the No Action Alternative and five other alternatives for management of OHV's on public lands. All alternatives comply with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976, and are subject to compliance with all valid statutes on BLM and NFS lands. Impacts of all resources are considered through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

No Action Alternative (Current Management)

This alternative would continue current direction and is used as the baseline condition for comparing the other alternatives. The BLM and FS would continue to manage OHV's using existing direction and regulations. It addresses a number of issues and concerns, such as the proposal is too restrictive and effects on the ground do not warrant any change. It also addresses the concern that it is unrealistic to provide consistent management of OHV's across a three-state area due to wide variations of issues and problems that would necessitate decisions be made at the local level.

Areas currently open seasonally or yearlong to motorized wheeled cross-country travel would remain open (Table 2.1 and Map 1). The table and map reflect designations identified in existing forest plans and resource management plans.

Table 2.1 Affected Areas Open Seasonally or Yearlong to Motorized Wheeled Cross-Country Travel (Acres)

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Open Seasonally</i>	<i>Open Yearlong</i>	<i>Total</i>
BLM	887,000	4,954,000	5,841,000
FS	3,847,000	6,343,000	10,190,000
Total	4,734,000	11,297,000	16,031,000

Site-specific planning and enforcement of OHV regulations would occur at current levels.

Alternative 1

This is the most restrictive alternative for management of OHV's in that motorized wheeled cross-country travel would be prohibited with only a few exceptions for emergency and limited administrative purposes. This alternative was developed to address concerns that OHV use needed to be restricted quickly and was overdue because of resource impacts and user conflicts. Concerns addressed were to stop the expansion of problems associated with the spread of noxious weeds, user conflicts, wildlife harassment and habitat alteration, effects on vegetation, soils and aquatic resources, and further deterioration of FS Inventoried Roadless, Recommended Wilderness and Montana Wilderness Study Areas. Alternative 1 best meets the concern for consistency on OHV management between BLM and NFS lands and would be the most easily enforceable alternative because of consistency and few exceptions.

The BLM and FS would restrict motorized wheeled cross-country travel yearlong (Map 1). These lands, approximately 16 million acres, would be designated limited or restricted yearlong under BLM or FS regulations (43 CFR 8342 or 36 CFR 295). The appropriate forest plan and resource management plan would be amended by this alternative.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel would be allowed for any military, fire, search and rescue, or law enforcement vehicle used for emergency purposes.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for BLM and FS official administrative business would not be allowed without prior approval by the authorized officer (field manager or district ranger).

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for lessees and permittees to administer federal leases or permits would not be allowed unless specifically authorized under the lease or permit.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel would not be allowed for the retrieval of a big game animal.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel would not be allowed for personal use permits such as firewood and Christmas tree cutting.

The following exception would apply unless currently restricted:

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for camping would be permissible within 50 feet of roads and trails by the most direct route after site selection by nonmotorized means. This exception does not apply where existing seasonal restrictions prohibit traveling off designated routes to a campsite.

Alternative 2

This alternative is based on the initial proposal and public comments received during scoping. It restricts motorized wheeled cross-country travel throughout the analysis area but allows some exceptions for relatively infrequent activities. Similar to Alternative 1, concerns addressed were to stop the expansion of problems associated with the spread of noxious weeds, user conflicts, wildlife harassment and habitat alteration, effects on vegetation, soils and aquatic resources, and further deterioration of FS Inventoried Roadless, Recommended Wilderness and Montana Wilderness Study Areas. It meets the concern that the agencies need to allow for some exceptions for motorized wheeled cross-country travel, such as game retrieval and camping. It provides almost the same ease of enforcement and consistency between the two agencies as Alternative 1.

The BLM and FS would restrict motorized wheeled cross-country travel yearlong (Map 1). These lands, approximately 16 million acres, would be designated limited or restricted yearlong under BLM or FS regulations (43 CFR 8342 or 36 CFR 295). The appropriate forest plan and resource management plan would be amended by this alternative.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel would be allowed for any military, fire, search and rescue, or law enforcement vehicle used for emergency purposes.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for BLM and FS official administrative business would be allowed.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for lessees and permittees to administer federal leases or permits would be allowed, unless specifically prohibited in the lease or permit. This would not change any existing terms or conditions in current leases or permits. However, this would not

preclude modifying leases or permits to limit motorized wheeled cross-country travel based on further site-specific analysis.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for personal use permits, such as firewood and Christmas tree cutting, could be permitted at the local level (BLM field office or FS ranger district) at the discretion of the authorizing officer.

The following exceptions would apply unless currently restricted:

1. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for camping would be permissible within 300 feet of roads and trails by the most direct route after site selection by nonmotorized means. This exception would not apply where existing seasonal restrictions prevent traveling off designated routes to a campsite.
2. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel by the most direct route to retrieve a big game animal in possession would be allowed only in the following field units in Montana: Miles City Field Office (FO), Billings FO, Malta FO, Lewistown FO with the exception of the Great Falls Field Station, and the Custer National Forest (NF) with the exception of the Beartooth Ranger District. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel in all other areas to retrieve a big game animal would not be allowed. Through subsequent site-specific planning big game retrieval could be restricted.

The following mitigation measures for the western prairie fringed orchid would apply:

1. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for FS official administrative business would not be allowed in known western prairie fringed orchid habitat on the Sheyenne National Grassland in eastern North Dakota without prior approval.
2. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for lessees and permittees to administer federal leases or permits would not be allowed in known western prairie fringed orchid habitat on the Sheyenne National Grassland in eastern North Dakota without prior approval.

Alternative 3

This alternative is based on the premise that the agencies should not restrict OHV use where problems are limited by steep terrain and dense vegetation or where existing regulations are adequate. Lands in the Flathead, Kootenai and Bitterroot National Forests in western Montana would not be affected by this alternative. Preliminary analysis indicated that even though significant amounts of federal land

were open to motorized wheeled cross-country travel in western Montana, current technology of OHV's generally has limited the expansion of user-created routes because of relative steepness and dense vegetation. Concerns for the need to restrict OHV's in the remainder of the analysis area are similar to Alternative 2. Concerns addressed were to stop the expansion of problems associated with the spread of noxious weeds, user conflicts, wildlife harassment and habitat alteration, effects on vegetation, soils and aquatic resources, and further deterioration of FS Inventoried Roadless, Recommended Wilderness and Montana Wilderness Study Areas. It meets the concern that the agencies need to allow some exceptions for motorized wheeled cross-country travel, such as game retrieval and camping.

The BLM and FS would prohibit motorized wheeled cross-country travel yearlong in the Miles City FO, Billings FO, Malta FO, Lewistown FO, Butte FO, Dillon FO, South Dakota FO, North Dakota FO, Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF, Custer NF, Dakota Prairie Grasslands, Gallatin NF, Helena NF, and the Lewis and Clark NF (Map 2). Approximately 12.5 million acres would be designated limited or restricted yearlong under the BLM or FS regulations (43 CFR 8342 or 36 CFR 295). The appropriate forest plan and resource management plan would be amended by this alternative.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel would be allowed for any military, fire, search and rescue, or law enforcement vehicle used for emergency purposes.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for BLM and FS official administrative business would be allowed.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for lessees and permittees to administer federal leases or permits would be allowed, unless specifically prohibited in the lease or permit. This would not change any existing terms or conditions in current leases or permits. However, this would not preclude modifying leases or permits to limit motorized wheeled cross-country travel based on further site-specific analysis.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for personal use permits, such as firewood and Christmas tree cutting, could be permitted at the local level (BLM field office or FS ranger district) at the discretion of the authorizing officer.

The following exceptions would apply unless currently restricted:

1. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for camping would be permissible within 300 feet of roads and trails by the most direct route after site selection by nonmotorized means. This exception does not apply where existing seasonal restrictions prohibit traveling off designated routes to a campsite.

2. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel by the most direct route would be allowed from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. to retrieve a big game animal that is in possession. Through subsequent site-specific planning big game retrieval could be restricted.

Alternative 4

This alternative restricts motorized wheeled cross-country travel seasonally to lessen impacts on resource values and to minimize user conflicts. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel would be restricted to times of the year when the ground is generally frozen (December 2 to February 15) or during dryer periods (June 15 to August 31) to reduce soil and vegetation impacts, aquatic resource damage, and to minimize user conflicts. No motorized wheeled cross-country travel would be allowed during big game hunting seasons in all three states, with the exception of game retrieval, to minimize user conflicts and wildlife harassment. Game retrieval would be allowed in all open areas of the analysis area. It meets the concern that the agencies need to allow some exceptions for motorized wheeled cross-country travel, such as game retrieval and camping. It provides almost the same ease of enforcement and consistency between the two agencies as Alternative 1 because the timing and exceptions are the same throughout the three-state area.

The BLM and FS would restrict motorized wheeled cross-country travel seasonally (Map 1). These areas would be open to motorized wheeled cross-country travel from June 15 to August 31 and from December 2 to February 15. These lands, approximately 16 million acres, would be designated limited or restricted seasonally under BLM or FS regulations (43 CFR 8342 or 36 CFR 295). The appropriate forest plan and resource management plan would be amended by this alternative.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel would be allowed for any military, fire, search and rescue, or law enforcement vehicle used for emergency purposes.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for BLM and FS official administrative business would be allowed.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for lessees and permittees to administer federal leases or permits would be allowed, unless specifically prohibited in the lease or permit. This would not change any existing terms or conditions in current leases or permits. However, this would not preclude modifying leases or permits to limit motorized wheeled cross-country travel based on further site-specific analysis.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for personal use permits, such as firewood and Christmas tree cutting, could

be permitted at the local level (BLM field office or FS ranger district) at the discretion of the authorizing officer.

The following exceptions would apply unless currently restricted:

1. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for camping would be permissible within 300 feet of roads and trails by the most direct route after site selection by nonmotorized means. This exception does not apply where existing seasonal restrictions prohibit traveling off designated routes to a campsite.
2. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel by the most direct route would be allowed to retrieve a big game animal that is in possession. Through subsequent site-specific planning big game retrieval could be restricted.

Alternative 5 (Preferred Alternative)

This alternative was developed in response to comments on the DEIS from the public and other agencies. It restricts motorized wheeled cross-country travel throughout the analysis area to protect riparian areas, wetlands, crucial wildlife habitat, threatened or endangered species, soils and vegetation, aquatic resources, and to reduce user conflicts. The alternative addresses the concern that the agencies need to allow an exception for camping, but includes specific limitations on that exception. This alternative would limit travel for administrative use by the BLM and FS, other government entities, and lessees and permittees, but would allow motorized wheeled cross-country travel when necessary.

The BLM and FS would restrict motorized wheeled cross-country travel yearlong (Map 1). These lands, approximately 16 million acres, would be designated limited or restricted yearlong for motorized wheeled cross-country travel under BLM or FS regulations (43 CFR 8342 or 36 CFR 295). The appropriate forest plan and resource management plan would be amended by this alternative.

Through subsequent site-specific planning, the BLM and FS would designate roads and trails for motorized use. With public involvement the agencies would continue with ongoing travel management plans and develop new travel management plans (i.e., landscape analysis, watershed plans, or activity plans) for geographical areas. Through site-specific planning, roads and trails would be inventoried, mapped, and analyzed to the degree necessary to evaluate and designate the roads and trails as open, seasonally open, or closed. The inventory would be commensurate with the analysis needs, issues, and desired resource conditions based on forest plan or resource management plan objectives for the analysis area.

Site-specific planning could include identifying opportunities for trail construction and/or improvement, or specific areas where intensive OHV use may be appropriate. A change in area designations from limited/restricted to open would require a plan amendment. Implementation and monitoring are described in Appendix B. Implementation includes prioritizing areas for site-specific planning within six months of the respective agencies' Record of Decision based on the resources in the area, such as riparian areas and threatened or endangered species, along with opportunities for recreational OHV use.

The agencies recognize there are some valid needs for motorized wheeled cross-country travel. However, when driving cross-country individuals should avoid riparian areas, avoid steep slopes, wash vehicles after use in weed-infested areas, travel with care near wildlife, avoid areas with important wildlife habitat, and travel with care near cultural sites. Restrictions in riparian areas, areas with steep slopes, important wildlife habitat areas, etc. are addressed through the BLM and FS normal permitting and leasing process based on existing management plans and best management practices. The following outlines the varied needs for motorized wheeled cross-country travel.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel would be allowed for any military, fire, search and rescue, or law enforcement vehicle used for emergency purposes.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for the BLM and FS would be limited to official administrative business as outlined by internal memo (see Appendix D). Examples of administrative use would be prescribed fire, noxious weed control, revegetation, and surveying. Where possible, agency personnel performing administrative functions would locate a sign or notice in the area they are working to identify for the public the function they are authorized to perform.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for other government entities on official administrative business would require authorization from the local field manager or district ranger in their respective areas. This authorization would be through normal permitting processes and/or memoranda of understanding. Some examples of other agency administrative use would be noxious weed control, surveying, and animal damage control efforts. Where possible, the authorized party performing administrative functions would locate a sign or notice in the area they are working to identify for the public the function they are authorized to perform.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for lessees and permittees would be limited to the administration of a federal lease or permit. Persons or corporations having such a permit or lease could perform administrative functions on

public lands within the scope of the permit or lease. However, this would not preclude modifying permits or leases to limit motorized wheeled cross-country travel during further site-specific analysis to meet resource management objectives or standards and guidelines. Some examples of administrative functions include, but are not limited to:

- Gas or electric utilities monitoring a utility corridor for safety conditions or normal maintenance,
- Accessing a remote communication site for normal maintenance or repair,
- Livestock permittees checking vegetative conditions, building or maintaining fences, delivering salt and supplements, moving livestock, checking wells or pipelines as part of the implementation of a grazing permit or lease, and
- Scientific groups under contract for resource assessments or research.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for personal use permits, such as firewood and Christmas tree cutting, could be allowed at the local level (BLM field office or FS ranger district) in specific areas identified for such use. In all other areas, motorized wheeled cross-country travel associated with personal use permits would not be allowed.

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for big game retrieval would not be allowed. The retrieval of a big game animal that is in possession (i.e. tagged), would be allowed on roads and trails unless currently restricted. Through subsequent site-specific planning, options for big game retrieval could be considered. For example, big game retrieval could be allowed from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily on restricted roads or trails. This big game retrieval requirement would also apply to the BLM's Big Dry and Judith-Valley-Phillips Resource Management Plans where motorized wheeled cross-country travel is currently allowed for big game retrieval.

The following exception would apply unless currently restricted:

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel to a campsite would be permissible within 300 feet of roads and trails. Site selection must be completed by nonmotorized means and accessed by the most direct route causing the least damage. This exception does not apply where existing seasonal restrictions prohibit traveling off designated routes to a campsite. Existing local rules take precedence over this exception. This distance could be modified through subsequent site-specific planning.

The following mitigation measures for the western prairie fringed orchid would apply:

1. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for FS official administrative business would not be allowed in known western prairie fringed orchid habitat on the Sheyenne National Grassland in eastern North Dakota without prior approval so as to eliminate impacts to occupied habitat.
2. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel for lessees and permittees to administer federal leases or permits would not be allowed in known western prairie fringed orchid habitat on the Sheyenne National Grassland in eastern North Dakota without prior approval so as to eliminate impacts to occupied habitat.

SELECTION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The alternatives were reviewed for effectiveness in resolving the planning issues, conformance with the guidance established by the planning criteria, avoidance of unnecessary impacts to the human environment, responsiveness to public concern, and compliance with BLM and FS statutory authority and Executive Orders 11644 and 11989. Based on those reviews, Alternative 5 is the Preferred Alternative and proposed plan amendment.

Alternative 5 was selected because it would minimize further resource damage, user conflicts and related problems, including new user-created roads, associated with motorized wheeled cross-country travel on 16 million acres of BLM and NFS lands and would provide management direction for subsequent site-specific planning to address motorized use on individual roads and trails.

Alternative 5 would not allow motorized wheeled cross-country travel for big game retrieval, although use of roads and trails to retrieve big game could continue. This game retrieval restriction would: reduce the conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized users during the hunting season; reduce the potential for introducing invasive weeds; reduce the potential for soil erosion; reduce the potential for impacts to wildlife; be more responsive to numerous public concerns that were expressed about the inappropriateness of allowing an exception for game retrieval; and be consistent with the long-term goal of using vehicles on designated routes.

Alternative 5 would maintain efficient and effective management of the public's resources by allowing limited motorized wheeled cross-country travel for management of the resources by agency personnel, permittees, lessees, and other government entities while conducting needed work.

This work would be conducted in a controlled manner, according to permit requirements, to mitigate potential adverse effects. Example requirements include the cleaning of equipment to avoid spreading invasive weeds, avoidance of threatened or endangered species habitat, timing restrictions, etc.

Alternative 5 would allow cross-country travel for military, fire, search and rescue, and law enforcement for emergency purposes consistent with BLM and FS regulations (43 CFR 8340.0-5 and 36 CFR 295.2).

Alternative 5 would allow for dispersed camping within 300 feet of a road or trail provided recreationists use the most direct route and select their site by nonmotorized means. This would allow people to move away from the dust and noise generated on the road. Agency recreation specialists expect relatively little use of this exception, as most popular dispersed campsites already have a road accessing them.

Alternative 5 would provide specific mitigation measures consistent with the Endangered Species Act for the threatened western prairie fringed orchid in known habitat on the Shyenenne National Grassland.

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

Table S.1 presents a summary of the alternatives described in Chapter 2, and Table S.2 summarizes the environmental consequences described in Chapter 3 for each of the alternatives. These tables are located in the Summary section of this FEIS. The reader is referred to Chapter 3 for specific information about the effects of each of the alternatives.

ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

The following alternatives were eliminated from detailed study because they did not meet the purpose and need of the proposal and/or due to technical, legal, or other constraints.

Forest Development Roads and Trails and BLM Designated Routes

An alternative to restrict OHV's to forest development roads and trails and BLM designated routes was eliminated from detailed study because it did not meet the purpose and need of this proposal.

As discussed in Chapter 1, two decision levels are necessary to achieve the long-term goal of designated roads and trails.

One level is a programmatic amendment to forest plans and resource management plans to change the designation of 16 million acres from open seasonally or yearlong to limited/restricted yearlong. This would protect the entire analysis area from further damage caused by motorized wheeled cross-country travel. The second level is to designate which individual roads and trails would be open, limited/restricted, or closed to motorized use consistent with the forest plan or resource management plan. This level, commonly referred to as site-specific planning, requires relatively detailed information about the location, condition and current uses of individual roads and trails. On occasion, decisions at both levels are completed simultaneously, generally on relatively small areas as compared to this FEIS.

The purpose of this FEIS is to accomplish the first level of planning to protect these areas from further damage in a timely manner. It also provides direction for completing the second level of planning. This alternative was eliminated from detailed study because it focused on completing the second level of designation, i.e. individual road and trail use, simultaneously with the change in area designations to limited/restricted. The Regional Forester and State Director determined that the second level, site-specific road and trail designations, would take many years to accomplish on all 16 million acres. The focus on road and trail designation precludes meeting in a timely manner the purpose and need of preventing further resource damage, user conflicts and related problems by motorized wheeled vehicles traveling cross-country. To meet the purpose and need of this proposal, the decision must be timely and the level of analysis should be commensurate with a broad-level programmatic document. The agencies do not want to delay the completion of the first level of planning and decided to keep the two decision levels separate.

In comments on the DEIS some people suggested there didn't need to be any site-specific planning because the FS has a designated system (forest development roads and trails), the BLM has existing recreation maps, and user-created roads and trails are illegal.

In areas that allow motorized cross-country travel, the creation of roads and trails has occurred through casual use. Roads and trails created by casual use are not illegal and the public's use of motorized vehicles in areas that allow cross-country travel is consistent with the forest plan or resource management plan.

As described in Chapter 1, there is an extensive network of roads, many authorized by the agencies that are not part of the forest development road system as well as user-created roads. The FS has recently developed a new policy and guidance to deal with this mixture of classified and unclassified roads (36 CFR 212). It directs the national forests and

grasslands to resolve the differences in classified and unclassified roads through inventory, analysis and planning at various scales and is best addressed at the site-specific level.

With the increase of OHV's in the last 10 years, the agencies recognize that the miles of user-created roads and trails have increased. The agencies also recognize that not all user-created roads and trails are causing resource problems. Only site-specific planning would enable the agencies to determine the suitability, capability, and appropriate mix of users (motorized, pedestrian, horse riders, bicyclists, etc.) on individual roads and trails to meet recreation and other concerns for a watershed or mountain range.

The detailed study of an alternative that would restrict OHV's to forest development roads and trails and BLM designated routes is better done at the local level through site-specific planning with an inventory, public involvement, and integration of other resource objectives and other types of recreational use. In order to insure that site-specific planning is completed on the most critical areas, a method of prioritizing site-specific planning activities and a monitoring plan are described in Appendix B.

Snowmobiles

An alternative to include snowmobile use in the proposal was eliminated from detailed study because the issues involving snowmobile access are different enough to potentially warrant a separate analysis.

This proposal addresses motorized wheeled vehicles such as motorcycles, ATV's, four-wheel drive vehicles, etc. Addressing snowmobile use in this proposal would complicate and lengthen the EIS process significantly. Since snowmobiles are usually driven on a layer of snow, their environmental effects are different than those of motorized wheeled vehicles (i.e. erosion, sedimentation, weed spread), which come into direct contact with the ground. User conflicts associated with snowmobiles are also different than those with motorized wheeled vehicles.

Site-Specific Alternatives

Several other alternatives, such as identifying additional intensive use areas, establishing areas on a rotating basis, leaving areas open near larger urban areas, addressing hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking, and restricting roads and trails based on the width, horsepower, or weight of vehicles, were eliminated from detailed study because these alternatives are not within the scope of this programmatic document and do not meet the purpose and need.

Like the forest development roads and trails and the BLM designated route alternative, these alternatives would not meet the purpose and need to protect 16 million acres from further resource damage, user conflicts, and related problems by motorized wheeled cross-country travel.

Through site-specific planning, specific areas where motorized wheeled cross-country travel is appropriate or OHV intensive use areas could be identified and designated. Also through site-specific planning, issues involving other uses on roads and trails (hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking) could be addressed and specific limitations for roads and trails (width or vehicle weight) could be identified.

Block Management

An alternative to address the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks block management program in the proposal was eliminated from detailed study because the block management program is not within the discretion or authority of the BLM or FS.

Block management is a cooperative program between private landowners and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks that provides the public with hunting access to private land and, sometimes, to adjacent or isolated public lands. Block management addresses fall hunting only.

Restrict Areas Greater than 5,000 Acres and Close All Areas to Off-Highway Vehicle Use

An alternative to restrict OHV's to small, isolated tracts of less than 5,000 acres and another alternative to close all areas to OHV's, including all roads and trails, were eliminated from detailed study because the BLM and FS recognize in their respective resource management plans and forest plans, policy, and manual direction, that OHV use is a valid recreational activity. Resource conditions, including vegetation, watershed, and wildlife habitat, do not warrant prohibition of vehicle travel on all public lands, including all roads and trails, to meet the purpose and need of this proposal.

Closed Unless Posted Open

An alternative to close areas and post only the roads and trails open to motorized travel was eliminated from detailed study because it did not meet the purpose and need of this proposal, which are to prevent further resource damage, user conflicts, and related problems associated with motorized wheeled cross-country travel in a timely manner until site-specific planning is completed.

This alternative specifies the method of designating routes. Like the forest development roads and trails and BLM designated routes alternative, this alternative could not be completed in a timely manner to provide interim direction. Site-specific planning would address OHV use on specific roads and trails. Through site-specific planning, roads and trails would be inventoried, mapped, and designated as open, seasonally open, or closed. Specific signing of designated roads and trails would be done under site-specific planning.

Montana State Lands Policy

One alternative was based on the State of Montana rules for recreational use of state lands. "Motorized vehicle use by recreationists on state lands is restricted to federal, state, and dedicated county roads and to those roads designated by the department to be open to motorized vehicle use." (77-1-804(6), Montana Code Annotated). Motorized cross-country driving is prohibited.

This alternative was eliminated from detailed study because the alternatives developed and addressed in this FEIS would restrict motorized wheeled cross-country travel similar to Montana rules. The designation of roads and trails as open, seasonally open, or closed to motorized vehicle use would be accomplished through site-specific planning as discussed above in the section "Forest Development Roads and Trails and BLM Designated Routes" and under "Management Common To All Alternatives." Under all the action alternatives (Alternatives 1-5), the BLM and FS would restrict motorized wheeled cross-country travel year-long, and through subsequent site-specific planning the BLM and FS would designate roads and trails for motorized use. Designation of specific roads and trails is a significant undertaking and cannot be done in the interim in a timely fashion. The purpose and need of this FEIS is to protect the environment by minimizing further resource damage, user conflicts, and related problems associated with motorized wheeled cross-country travel until site-specific planning is completed.